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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH.¹

I. IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

LIST NO. 1: QUESTIONS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

1. What subjects studied in the primary and grammar schools do you include under the term *English*, or *Language*?
2. How many hours of the week are devoted to each of these subjects in the first grade? in the third? in the sixth? in the eighth (or ninth)?
3. What do you regard as the chief aims of the English work viewed as a whole?
4. In addition to the natural influences and opportunities afforded by the schoolroom for improving the children's speech, is there any organized effort made in your school to improve the spoken English of the pupils—(a) as to quality of voice, (b) as to clearness of articulation, (c) as to common illiteracies of speech?
5. Do you have spoken composition work to any extent?
6. Is the written composition work of the earlier years especially designed to cultivate *accuracy*, or *facility*?
7. Have you any opinions on the teaching of spelling that would be of service to others who are struggling with the spelling problem? In teaching spelling, do you believe in making an especial point of syllabication? Do you approve of oral spelling, or do you think that all spelling recitations should be in writing?
8. Are especial details of written form (such as the comma in a series, quotation marks, etc.) assigned to given grades for especially thorough study?
9. What proportion of the composition work is examined by the teacher? What proportion do the pupils revise without rewriting? What proportion do they rewrite?
10. Are the same standards of excellence insisted upon in all written exercises, whether they are or are not regarded as "compositions"?
11. What are the sources of supply for composition subjects?
12. Are your pupils encouraged to write often with the thought of a specific audience?
13. Do you ever interchange compositions with other schools for mutual criticism by the pupils?
14. Are themes often read before the class by pupil or by teacher?
15. How large a proportion of the reading supplied in regular and supplementary "reading books" deserves to be called literature,—in the third grade? the sixth grade? the eighth (ninth) grade?

¹ Report of Committee on Methods of Teaching and Studying English, presented to the New England Association of Teachers of English, by the Committee on Methods of Teaching and Studying English, March, 1902.

16. Apart from the literature supplied in the reading books, is there a definite program in literature for each grade, or is each teacher left to her own judgment in the choice of literature? If there is a definite program in literature, we shall be very grateful for as full a statement of it as you may find it convenient to send.

17. Does the study of literature in your schools include the following kinds of work? (*a*) Reading literature to the class by the teacher; (*b*) reading literature aloud in class by pupils; (*c*) reading literature at home, to be discussed in class; (*d*) telling stories by the teacher; (*e*) telling stories by the children; (*f*) recitation of poetry by the pupils?

18. Assuming that the main effort of the teacher is to interest the pupils in *what* the author has to say, is any effort made to make them conscious and appreciative of *how* the author says it — in the third grade? the sixth? the eighth (ninth)?

19. In what lines is there the greatest need of improvement in the English work?

20. How, in your judgment, may such improvement be effected?

Your committee has decided that it is practically impossible to report upon all the phases of English work at this meeting, and proposes to discuss the subject of expression, including both spoken and written English, omitting thereby an equally important if not more important matter, and to many of us a more interesting matter, the teaching of literature, except in so far as the teaching of literature must be considered in dealing with the question of the pupil's expression.

As you are aware, three series of questions on the teaching of English were sent out by your committee about the middle of January. These questions were sent not only to members of the association, but to elementary and secondary schools, both public and private, throughout New England, and to colleges in and outside of New England. We have taken it for granted that the purpose of the association is not to accumulate statistics but to learn of one another and from outsiders how better work may be done in the teaching of English, therefore we have attempted to secure information from only a limited number of representative persons. My own questions were sent to seventy persons connected with elementary school work, forty of whom are outside of this association. The list includes superintendents of schools, principals of schools, teachers connected with training schools, and teachers in elementary schools. Forty replies have been

received, fifteen from members and twenty-five from persons outside of the association. A number of the replies have been unexpectedly full and valuable, and all have been useful and suggestive. I feel greatly indebted to my correspondents for their courtesy and assistance. It would be entirely unscientific to assume that from these replies we can know what is being done throughout New England; the replies, however, have this value: they call attention to fruitful lines of endeavor which may well be imitated, to errors which are to be avoided, and to debatable points which, it is hoped, may be discussed by this association.

The province of a committee on methods is in itself a debatable question, inasmuch as the term methods is variously understood and frequently abused. In this report I shall use the term to signify the means employed in attempting to realize the purposes of the English work. This immediately suggests that the whole question of method depends upon a much more important and more fundamental matter—the question of purpose or aim. The shallowness and ineffectualness of many so-called methods are due, I am convinced, to the inadequacy of the teacher's conception of purpose. To be specific, a teacher of average ability who sees with absolute clearness that one purpose for which the state employs her is that she may teach children from illiterate homes to use English intelligibly, who sees it so clearly that she weighs her own work in the balance and finds it wanting when she fails to attain this end, may be trusted to find intelligent and effectual methods; whereas the teacher who fails to see this objective point clearly may use the exercises elaborated in language books and may imitate the methods of successful teachers—and all with no results worth the name. I do not wish to imply for a moment that method is a matter of slight importance; it is a matter of grave importance; but it should take its true place in subordination to purpose.

In view of this relation between purpose and method, I thought it best, in sending out my questions, to ask about the purposes of the English work before making inquiries in regard to the methods. It seemed necessary, however, to understand

first what each writer included under the term "English," or "language." In answer to this inquiry I find every variety of opinion, from the one extreme of including the entire curriculum under the term "English" to the other of making the term "English" synonymous with composition. There is a corresponding variety in the statements as to the purposes of the English work; but a few of the answers point out distinctly what seems to your committee to be the twofold purpose of the English work: the first is a practical purpose—the ability to handle the mother-tongue, to read it, to speak it, to write it with such intelligence that a certain independence is secured, a power to understand and to be understood. Now it is perfectly possible to develop this practical power of interpretation and expression without developing a love for literature; a person may speak and read and write with intelligence without being a lover of good books; here, then, we have the second aim, spiritual rather than practical in its import, far-reaching in its ultimate influence on life. The far-sighted English teacher works with all these ends in view; every exercise that goes by the name of English in her program has for its primary purpose one or more of these aims. Such a teacher constantly judges the efficacy of her work from this standpoint of purpose. "Do my pupils speak better, read more intelligently, write more easily, do they choose and read good books?"—these are the practical tests which she applies to her own work.

Before considering the remaining questions, a word of explanation is necessary. Two most essential features of the elementary English work are not touched upon in these inquiries, the methods of teaching beginners how to read and the methods of teaching formal grammar. The first subject was omitted because, although one of the most essentially interesting subjects to the primary teacher and to the student of general education, it is not a question which touches closely the interests of an association such as this. Grammar was omitted because it is too large a subject to be considered in so limited an investigation.

Questions 4 and 5 deal with speech-training. A child's equipment in speech when he enters the elementary school is

on an entirely different plane from his equipment in any other phase of the English work. He is not able to read his mother-tongue, and he is not able to write it; he may or may not have begun to develop a taste for good literature, for he may have come from a home where *Mother Goose*, the old fairy tales, and the Bible stories are known and loved, or he may have come from a home barren of these and of kindred joys; but he invariably enters the primary school with considerable development in the matter of speech; he has a large vocabulary, when one considers how brief a space of time has been devoted to accumulating it, and certain habits of construction, articulation, voice, inflection, etc., that immediately individualize him. Here is the English teacher's most perplexing problem. By means of wise instruction she may teach a child how to read and write, she may even cultivate his unformed literary taste by giving him the best only—the best for a child, that is—but in the matter of speech, she must take him as he is, with all his imperfections on his head; she must not only form new habits, she must break up a score of old ones; the good must not be added to the bad, it must displace the bad.

In answering the question, which occurs at the end of the circular, as to the lines in which there is the greatest need of improvement, especial emphasis is laid on spoken English. It is a satisfaction to find that this need is recognized, for the recognition of an evil is the first step toward its reform. In my own experience the work done in this direction by our best teachers of English is less systematized and less effective than in any other phase of the English work. And yet the answers to questions 4 and 5 are very encouraging. Out of the thirty-three answers received, twenty-four say *yes* to both questions, and some writers add, in answer to the inquiry in regard to common illiteracies, "constant effort is made." Now, constant effort is not organized effort, and I have sometimes suspected that our failure is due, in part at least, to this constant, faithful, nagging effort. "The correction that does not correct" is a familiar experience here: a child is guilty of some solecism in his speech, the teacher amiably supplies the correct expression, perhaps the

child repeats it mechanically, perhaps he does not repeat it at all ; the lesson proceeds, the next day the same thing occurs, the constant effort of the faithful teacher is renewed, and so on to the end of the chapter.

Now, this is both unphilosophical and unworthy. An organized effort in this matter implies at least three things that may be done in any school : First, a classified list may be made of the faults most common among the pupils ; second, although no teacher should ignore any of the faults mentioned, to each teacher may be assigned certain errors against which a special crusade may be carried on while the pupils are under her charge ; third, every teacher needs to see clearly what means are at her disposal, and needs to use these means intelligently. These are the obvious means available in the schoolroom for improving and developing the children's speech — environment, instruction, practice. Because our speech is so largely the result of our environment, some enthusiasts have believed that nothing is necessary in the schoolroom but a wholesome and stimulating environment ; and I agree heartily with them that this is the first essential. Given a teacher whose speech is first interesting and then accurate, given a generous supply of good reading and a wide range of wholesome interests, and the speech of the children must inevitably be benefited in many ways : their vocabulary must increase, their constructions must improve, their articulation and inflection even may become more cultivated ; but this is not enough, as experience has often proved. There are two types of people whose speech is not reformed by environment : first, those who are naturally oblivious to all forms of speech, who notice no difference between their own speech and that of others, who are unaware that they make errors ; and, second, those who have a few bad habits of speech fixed by so many years of practice that, although they may know better theoretically, they make these particular errors unconsciously. Let me cite two examples that have come under my observation recently : One is a girl who came from an illiterate home, but who, until the age of fourteen, was in school under the charge of teachers who spoke good English ; at that age she left school

and took up an occupation that carried her from family to family ; as she was an absolutely trustworthy and friendly soul she was brought into close relations with people of much cultivation and refinement ; her opportunities for hearing delightful English were unusual ; she was very observing in many ways, and in her topics of conversation and her knowledge of the ways of refined living soon began to show the result of her environment : but her speech remained practically unchanged, full of the most glaring illiteracies. It was quite evident that she needed something besides environment. The other was a girl who had excellent school advantages until she was twenty years old ; her vocabulary was unusually large, her appreciation of literature was genuine and ardent ; in the course of fifteen minutes I heard her use *lay* for *lie*, *I wisht* for *I wish*, and *like* for *as*. She, too, had needed something besides environment. Both girls had needed, early in their school lives, to have their errors of speech brought to their attention and the correct forms supplied, *i. e.*, they had needed definite instruction ; both had needed practice in saying the right things, in feeling their organs of speech produce the unfamiliar combinations ; a conscious effort to do the right thing was essential. (Some of us are very much afraid of making children conscious of their speech : I think this is an unwarrantable anxiety.) And somehow or other—and it is perfectly feasible—instruction and practice must be so managed that an enthusiasm for good speech is aroused ; this is the most essential element of all ; this accounts for the fact that, whereas, one girl from an illiterate home continues in her habits of illiteracy, another who has received the same instruction, but in whom an earnest desire for better speech has been aroused, uses a language conspicuously different from that of her parents. Environment, instruction, practice, and all of them shot through with the interest that stimulates to endeavor—these means are at the disposal of every one of us.

A word about the nature of the practice is necessary. It must strike directly at the fault in question, and not beat about the bush. A child whose articulation is slovenly, who drops his

g's or puts an *r* after the *aw* sound, may go on repeating such words as *singing* and *saw* after his teacher indefinitely, and he will still drop his *g*'s and use that intrusive *r*—so retiring and coy in our average New England speech; what he needs is to use such words as *singing* in the midst of other words and such words as *saw* with a vowel sound immediately following. A story is told—it may be a story only, but every teacher knows that it is essentially true—of a boy who used the expression, “I have went home;” thereupon his teacher made him write *I have gone* fifty times after school; the teacher was not in the room when the task was finished, and, in order to explain his disappearance, he added in good faith at the end of his paper, “I have went home,” and departed, leaving the document on his desk, an unwitting monument to the teacher’s folly.

One other somewhat pressing question presents itself in connection with spoken English: How shall the children’s sentence sense be trained? how shall the sentence habit, as we like to call it, be established? Some people believe that the children should never speak in school except in complete sentences. I knew a school in which this rule of action was carried so far that, upon being asked by the teacher, as she pointed out a word in the spelling-lesson, “What word is that?” the children would reply, “I think the word is so-and-so.” Now, the absurdity and wastefulness of this are evident. Moreover, the effort to have every expression of thought in the shape of a full-fledged sentence when observing and discussing things in which the pupils are really interested, such as pictures, or plants, or books, is entirely contrary to the customs of cultivated people. Imagine visiting an art gallery with a friend, and, as you walked from painting to painting enjoying the spontaneous interchange of opinion, being suddenly forced to express yourself in complete sentences only! Of course, the excuse offered for this exaggerated method is that it is difficult to draw the line, and that, unless children are required to talk in sentences all the time, they will neither talk nor write in complete sentences when occasion requires. I can only say that this statement is not borne out by my own observation and experience; in my own classes and in

watching the work of other people, I have found it perfectly possible to carry on a natural, informal conversation—an interchange of impressions—about a picture for example, with no thought of sentences, with no thought of anything but the picture and an occasional correction in pronunciation or the choice of a word—and later to gather together in an orderly and complete way all that has been thought and said, as a bit of oral or written composition. The point lies just here: the habit of good sentence construction and transition is due to two things—first, to a knowledge of what a sentence is and of what constitutes suitable transition from one sentence to another (not a knowledge that can express itself in definition, but a knowledge that makes it possible to recognize that this group of words is a sentence, and that group is not); and second, much practice in making and combining sentences. Children learn with surprising quickness to differentiate between the group of words constituting a part of a sentence and the complete sentence; this is observable in the lowest grade. It is true the teachers are often unduly afraid of the term *sentence*, and say to the children, “Give me the *whole* story,” and the child responds with the complete sentence. The little child’s most conspicuous fault in transition is to introduce every sentence with *and*; when this error is pointed out, however, he takes a distinct pride in overcoming it. So far as practice is concerned, there are numerous opportunities that can be made use of every day: in the higher grades the formal recitation from topics of history and geography, and perhaps physiology and the explanation of problems in arithmetic; and, in the lower grades, reproduction of stories, simple accounts of personal experience, descriptions of the pictures that have been discussed informally—all combine to provide ample opportunity for the making and combining of sentences.

Some one may ask whether following an informal conversation about a picture by a formal rearrangement and restatement of what has been already said does not involve an anti-climax from the standpoint of interest. That depends entirely, I have found, upon the motive or purpose of the more formal oral exercise; if it is in preparation, for instance, for a written exercise

which is to be taken home to some one who has not seen the picture, or if any other appealing social motive is used, there need be no falling off in interest. I would say, too, in passing, that, with the exception of literature, no subject of study found in the elementary school gives so delightful and natural an opportunity of enlarging the children's vocabulary and of teaching them a discriminating use of words as the effort to express what is seen and enjoyed in a picture.

In regard to this matter of spoken composition, then, a matter which involves proper choice of words, proper combination of words into sentences, and suitable transition from one sentence to another, I have been trying to say simply this—that a knowledge of what is right and much practice are needed, and that such practice need not encroach upon the perfectly natural and informal interchange of opinion that should be a part of the schoolroom life.

Question 6 asks whether the written composition work of the earlier years in the elementary school is especially designed to cultivate accuracy or facility. Of the thirty-four answers received to this question, eight say both, ten say accuracy, and sixteen say facility. You will see, then, that a decided majority of those who choose one consider facility the more important matter. This opinion does not agree with the opinion of your committee. To us it seems that accuracy should not be sacrificed to facility, as is too often the case when facility is the prominent aim. Written forms are matters of habit, comparatively easy to acquire provided the practice be as nearly correct as possible from the beginning, very difficult to reform if the practice has been inaccurate and careless. Of course, the reason offered here is that children who are obliged to think continually about sentences, paragraphs, punctuation, etc., are so hampered and burdened that they cannot express themselves spontaneously. There are at least two ways of meeting this obstacle: one is to give ample opportunity for spontaneity and facility in oral expression, the other is to familiarize children with the forms of written English through well-selected copying and dictation exercises, in which the attention is necessarily on the

form, and through which the use of correct forms may become habitual. Then, in their written composition—although they must give some thought to form, as they know that accuracy is expected—the pupils will at the same time use quite unconsciously many of the correct forms which have been growing into matters of habit. I am inclined to think that the accurate emptiness of the little themes that we sometimes get from the older grammar-school children is due not so much to the stress laid upon accuracy as to the lack of effort made to enlarge the children's experience and to stimulate their thought.

Question 7 deals with spelling. It would take more time than can possibly be given to report and discuss the interesting answers to this question. I will say, in passing, that thirty persons express approval of syllabication and only one disapproval, and that there is a unanimous verdict in favor of more or less oral spelling. One reply contains a statement of much significance, which I commend to your consideration. This reply comes from the Horace Mann School, a school for the education of the deaf, and is as follows: "The pupils educated in the Horace Mann School, as a rule, do not misspell. We think this due to their constant use of written language."

Question 8 asks whether certain details of written form are assigned to particular grades for especial study. Twenty-seven answer this question in the affirmative, seven in the negative. I should like to read three replies to this question, each from a writer whose position and success give weight to his opinion. The first says:

No. Punctuation, being a means of making the writer's thoughts clear to the reader, should be studied in connection with the expression of thought.

(Beyond the period, comma, question and quotation marks, the use of punctuation cannot be successfully taught until the pupil is able to construct long sentences and finds the need of punctuation to make himself clear. We do not attempt much beyond what has been stated below the seventh grade.) The second says:

We do assign special uses of punctuation marks, of capital letters, and certain abbreviations to each of the lower grades. I believe that, whilst this

is somewhat arbitrary, it is the effective way to get done in each grade what ought to be done.

The third says :

Yes, but they usually have to be taught again in the next grade. I have suggested that these technical facts be taught when they are first needed by the children, in whatever grade they are.

Different as these three answers are, they give the essential features of the plan that I am about to recommend. Before outlining this plan, however, it is necessary to make a distinction in the use of a term. *Teaching* a written form may mean illustrating and explaining it so that it is understood, or it may mean, in addition, giving sufficient practice to cause the use of the written form to become habitual. It seems to me that it should mean the second. The written forms that should have become habitual when a pupil enters the secondary school are the arrangement on the page with due regard to margins, the use of capitals, and the use of all the punctuation marks. Some of these—like the arrangement on the page, the capital at the beginning of the sentence, and the period at the end—are needed in the very lowest grade; others—like the semicolon, and the comma before an additional clause, as distinguished from a restrictive clause—cannot be fully understood until grammar is studied, and would naturally come in the seventh or eighth grades. Of course, whatever is taught in one grade has to be reviewed in subsequent grades; but, if it has been taught with ample practice, the reviewing takes but little time, comparatively. Now suppose the exigencies of a bit of written composition require the use of some form not yet taught, as, for example, the plural possessive in the second grade. Here the form may be shown and explained, and the brighter children will make it theirs; but it does not seem essential that the whole class should have the practice in the form necessary to make the matter an unconscious habit; that concentrated practice may come in a later grade. As for the method of study recommended in the first reply, of course the best way to introduce any new usage is in connection with the natural expression of thought when the need is felt.

In considering this question it must be borne in mind that,

when a very large and general demand is made of a teacher rather than a reasonable and definite requirement, the results are likely to be unsatisfactory; and, from the standpoint of the elementary school as a whole with its eight grades, the danger is that certain usages will require unnecessary emphasis, and that others will be almost entirely neglected. It would seem reasonable and practicable, then—and I will add that I am speaking from experience here—to assign for especial practice certain details to the grades where they are most likely to be first needed and frequently needed, at the same time to leave every teacher free to explain and illustrate other needed usages to which she cannot give an equal amount of drill, and to call for the review in each grade of all usages previously taught.

To question 9—"What proportion of the composition work is examined by the teacher? What proportion do the pupils revise without rewriting? What proportion do they rewrite?"—the replies are so varying that it is difficult to arrive at any consensus of opinion. I am quite ready to admit that this is largely the fault of the question. Of the twenty-eight who answer the first part of the question, twenty say that all or nearly all of the written work done by the pupils is examined by the teacher, five say that one-half is examined, and three imply that less than one-half is examined by the teacher. The answers to the other parts of the question are too few and too vague to make it worth while to report them. There is certainly no matter connected with the English work of the elementary school upon which it is so difficult to come to any wise conclusion; and provided the wise conclusions were reached, it would be difficult to state them briefly, inasmuch as the written English of the elementary school extends over eight years, and what is demanded by the work of the low grades differs materially from what is required in the high grades. But out of the conflicting theories and practices a few principles of action emerge. In the first place, to quote a favorite injunction, "Children should not be allowed to write for the waste basket:" this does not mean, however, that every paper of every child should be examined by the teacher; with nearly sixty pupils to the teacher, with frequent written work,

and with that written work only one feature of an exacting school program consisting of seven or eight different subjects, all taught by that one teacher, this is a practical impossibility; the teacher must, however, read enough of the papers written by each child as to discover his chief needs and his progress, and to make him recognize the fact that his work may be examined at any time and that it frequently is examined. This is not an ideal arrangement, and it points emphatically to the urgent need of fewer pupils to the teacher in the elementary school—a change more called for, probably, than any other purely administrative reform. In the second place, examination by the teacher must not mean correction by the teacher, a practice that inevitably deprives a child of 90 per cent. of the benefit that should come to him from the teacher's examination of his work; it should mean rather the indication of necessary corrections. In the third place, the pupil must show by revision that he understands the teacher's criticisms; rewriting, it seems to me, should be less frequent than revision, and should grow less not only as the work of a given year proceeds but as the total work of the elementary school proceeds, unless the nature of the criticism is such as to call for reconstruction of the entire theme rather than for correction of individual errors. In the fourth place the pupil should be trained as early as possible to become his own critic, for eventually that is what he must be. It seems worth while to state briefly a plan of work that is being successfully tried in the higher grades of an elementary school in Massachusetts. The pupils are provided with a set of questions which they have more or less in mind as they write, and which they apply deliberately to their own work after they have finished writing.

QUESTIONS.

1. Was it worth writing?
2. Is it divided into paragraphs correctly?
3. Are the paragraphs divided into sentences correctly?
4. Is the writing neat, legible, not crowded?
5. Is the meaning clear?
6. Are words used correctly?
7. Omissions?
8. Are capitals used correctly?

9. Is the spelling (including syllabication) correct?
10. Is the punctuation correct?
11. Is the grammar correct?
12. Construction?

STAGES IN THE WORK.

1. Pupils write, leaving margins on both sides.
2. Each pupil corrects his own writing, using the questions as a guide for self-criticism. He actually makes the corrections, so far as is possible. Margins not used.
3. One of the exercises is written on the blackboard. The class and teacher together discuss and correct it.
4. The exercises are distributed to the class, no one receiving the one he wrote. Each pupil examines an exercise, indicating in the margin (by number or some other symbol) the mistakes he finds, but not correcting them.
5. The teacher examines the papers (all or part) at this stage, noting the proficiency of the pupil both in writing the exercise and in criticising, adding marks of criticism, and striking out marks of criticism that should not have been made.
6. Each pupil receives his paper, bearing in the margin the marks indicating the mistakes, and copies the exercise into his book, correcting the mistakes. During this time the teacher is at the service of the class to assist them. The book must not be considered absolutely free from mistakes.

It will be readily seen that this scheme does not save the teacher work, in the early stages of its use at least ; but the result ought eventually to be that the pupils become more thoughtful, more discriminating, more accurate, and that therefore in the long run the teacher's work be materially diminished. The details of the plan might of course be modified ; its merit lies in these essential features: (1) definite lines of improvement known to the pupil, in which his own interest is enlisted and for which he is held responsible ; (2) an opportunity to develop his critical powers by applying them both to his own work and to somebody's else ; (3) a final judgment from the teacher.

Question 10 asks whether the same standards of excellence are insisted upon in all written exercises. Of the thirty-six persons who answer this question, twenty-one say *yes* ; thirteen say *yes* with reservations ; two say *no*. I am inclined to think that those who say *yes* with reservations are not only nearer the

truth as it is, but are nearer the truth as it should be. The same standards of spelling, for example, should be required in the rapidly written history report and in the theme carefully prepared for the English lesson; but there should certainly be a more conscious effort for fitness of expression in the latter, and in this respect the same standards should not be applied to both. I once knew a teacher in an elementary school who complained bitterly because her pupils did very careless work in English composition. "How often do your pupils write compositions?" I inquired. "Once in two weeks," was the answer. "Do you have any other written work?" "Oh, yes, the boys write their history lesson every morning." "And what sort of written English do they produce in their history exercises?" "Oh, I never pay any attention to their English in those exercises. I haven't time," was the reply. I comfort myself with the thought that this is an extreme case; but it is this type of thing—often exhibited in a less flagrant form—that is responsible for much of the slovenly, indifferent work that we find.

Question 11 asks for the nature of the subjects used for composition exercises. Almost everyone replies that the regular school subjects provide topics for composition, and perhaps half the number add to this source of supply the personal experience and outside interests of the pupils. That the school subjects should furnish a part of the material for compositions seems essential for two reasons: (1) the work done in geography, history, etc., needs the added stimulus, the demand for clear thinking and exact expression that writing requires, (2) an entire avoidance of the regular subjects of study of the schoolroom, especially if we substitute for them an attempt to stimulate the thought and imagination in unnatural directions, is likely to make composition seem like an end in itself, and this is certainly a most unfortunate attitude for teacher or pupil to take. Should we not rather ask, what are the subjects upon which the pupil has occasion to express himself both in school and outside of school, and in the next place what are the matters in which it is desirable to arouse his interest and upon which he should be led to express himself? In other words, his own life, and the larger

life of the world as it is now making itself or as it is recorded in books, and into which the teacher hopes to lead him, should furnish the topics upon which he is to write. This basis of choice affords great variety and contributes materially to a child's education, preparing him for the real exigencies that he is to meet and at the same time increasing his appreciation of some things that otherwise he might pass by unheedingly.

Questions 12, 13, and 14 are as follows: 12. "Are your pupils encouraged to write often with the thought of a specific audience?" 13. "Do you ever interchange compositions with other schools, for mutual criticism by the pupils?" 14. "Are themes often read before the class by pupil or by teacher?"

Of course the controlling thought in all the practices suggested by this group of questions is the appeal to the pupil's social instinct, his natural desire for communication, his natural inclination to share his thought with others. Such practices give purpose and dignity to his work. The recognition and application of this motive in written work will be fully discussed in the two reports that are to follow. The answers that I have received indicate that considerable work of this sort is done in the elementary schools.

Questions 19 and 20 ask in what phases of the English work there is the greatest need of improvement and how such improvement may be effected. Sixteen think that expression, either oral or written, or both, calls most loudly for improvement; four say spelling; two speak of the need of cultivating a greater interest in literature; one speaks of oral reading. It is evident that our views as to the greatest needs of our pupils are likely to vary with our own individual interests and with the special conditions under which we teach. In a district in which the majority of the pupils are drawn from illiterate homes, the need of improvement in spoken English is certainly the conspicuous and crying necessity; in a school in which the English is fairly good and the prevailing current of life vapid and frivolous, the need of a thorough interest in good, wholesome books impresses the earnest teacher most strongly; in a district in which the superintendent calls for frequent proofs of the pupils' skill in English

composition, the teacher would hardly be human if she did not regard improvement in written English as the conspicuous need. Although my own belief is that our greatest need in the elementary school is to establish among our pupils the habit of reading good books, the scope of this paper demands that I should consider under question 20 only the means that may be used in effecting improvement in the pupils' power to express themselves.

Many familiar remedies are proposed, such as better teachers, greater thoroughness, patient and persistent instruction; and one man who believes better spoken English to be our greatest need suggests that a more discriminating choice of parents is the only remedy. In attempting to express my own view, I can find no words so suggestive as those used by President Eliot in a memorable address on "Education" delivered last November under the auspices of the Twentieth Century Club. These are his words:

Concerning an educated individual, we may fairly ask, "Can he see straight? Can he recognize the fact? Next, can he draw a just inference from established facts?"

We teachers of English need to see straight, to recognize the fact, to draw just inferences from established facts. There are two sets of facts with which we need to concern ourselves: first, the purposes of our work, *i. e.*, the ideal ends — none the less facts — for which we are striving; second, the facts as to the present condition of our pupils. I think that I am justified in saying that as a body we do not see with half the needed clearness the ends toward which we should be working. I am sure that we do not see things as they are with the largeness of view and the hopefulness that the facts warrant. We find among many teachers an extremely pessimistic attitude about the power of expression, especially in speech, shown by the rising generation; it is fashionable in some quarters to talk as if our English were going to the dogs. I believe profoundly that there never was a time when English was spoken and written so well by so large a proportion of the people. If you feel pessimistic you need only to compare the pupils of a great public school system like that of Boston with their parents. The children from

educated homes are following in the parents' footsteps, although their English is, of course, immature; and the children from illiterate homes are immeasurably above their parents in the purity of their speech and in their ability to write. As an indication of the work that the schools have been doing, may I give a bit of personal experience? For seventeen years now I have taught girls coming from some six or more Boston high schools and from scattering high schools outside of Boston; the written English of the pupils has improved conspicuously within these years; a set of themes from a present entering class is far and away ahead of those prepared by the entering classes of fifteen and seventeen years ago. The spoken English is not conspicuously better. This indicates the direction in which the best work has been done, and the direction in which better work is needed; but it shows above all how encouraging the facts are.

To greater clearness in our grasp of the facts and their significance, we need to add better organization of our work. Better organization can only come through co-operation; and co-operation means working with approximately common aims, with methods that do not defeat one another, although there may be infinite variety in them, and with a rational agreement as to the division of labor, which shall save us, on the one hand, from doing over one another's work, and, on the other, from altogether neglecting some essential detail. For the individual teacher I would ask, then, greater clearness of view; for the body of teachers, better organization: only as we gain in these directions may we hope for substantial growth in our pupils' power to use their mother-tongue.

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